The Road from the New Birth to the Stature of Christ

A "Kingdom with streets of gold," where there are no tears, no pain, and no more death, is something that may capture the attention of many. (And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4; And the street of the city was pure gold. Revelation 21:21)

We can confidently say there is no person who, when presented with a land offering a life full of joy – free from trouble, suffering, and death – would not desire such a Kingdom.

However, this Kingdom, with its "streets of gold," also involves spiritual realities that are difficult for the human mind to grasp – things that, to most people, seem like foolishness. (The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him. 1 Corinthians 2:14)

These heavenly things are differ entirely from the things found in the world we were born into. For these reasons, the "Kingdom of God" remains a great mystery to many of us. (As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9)

We notice that when people are asked what happens after this life ends, and what we must do to live eternally in the Kingdom of God, the vast majority are deeply confused.

Because of a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, we see today how many people are misled by various theories about how to enter the Kingdom of God.

Most have come to believe that salvation (which for many lies only in the forgiveness of sins) can be obtained if we admire God for what He has done for us, if we believe in the sacrifice at the cross. Many believe that if we confess our sins and have a form of godliness that consists of gratitude for what the Lord Jesus has done for us, it is enough to have free entry into His eternal Kingdom.

Most of us stop at repentance, the work of the cross, the covenant of baptism, and the forgiveness of sins. We are left assuming that God will somehow perfect us through a mysterious process after death.

And this is where most of us remain. We went to church, had our seat, confessed our sins, were baptized, sang songs, supported the teachings of our church, lived a

religious life – and believe that, through this, we will enter the Kingdom of God. This is where the work of salvation stops for most – without realizing that God's plan includes both the restoration and the perfection of human character.

Almost no one believes that in order to be found worthy of the life that awaits us in His eternal Kingdom, we must grow to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, till we all come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13)

Earthly Matters

Many of us would like to get there, to take part in the Kingdom of God. But the spiritual values of this Kingdom are of no interest to most, being incompatible with the way we live. These values of God require us to give up many things that, until now, have been very useful to us in life.

From the moment we are small children, in order to reach our goals, we begin to rely – more or less – on the rule: "the end justifies the means." As schoolchildren, we resort to cheating, plagiarism, and lying. Later, as adults, we turn to other things: deceit, bribery, arguments, anger....

We can confidently say that there is no one who has never used a lie. Lying is used when someone is late for work, when arriving home late, when applying for a job, in business... It’s easy to see that those who choose to give up lying must be willing to pay the price of losing the advantages it brings.

Another thing of great value to each of us is selfishness – self-love. From the moment we are born, we want as much as possible, only for ourselves, and our entire life ends up revolving around this.

However, we must recognize that self-love is not among the values of the Kingdom of God. It is the opposite of the love and selflessness that govern this Kingdom. (Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own. 1 Corinthians 13:4,5)

In this world, things are arranged in such a way – by "someone" – that in order to get by, we are tempted to rely on things that do not belong to the Kingdom of God. Satan comes to us just as he came to the Lord Jesus, tempting us with various "advantages" in order to trap us in his net. (All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Matthew 4:9)

He works in such a way that when we hear the Word of the Kingdom and want to exchange our old ways for the Kingdom’s new ways, we find ourselves so entangled in the old that we cannot let them go. (...the sin which doth so easily beset us. Hebrews 12:1)

In order to make it through this life and maintain a decent standard of living, many of us give in to Satan's offers. He offers us things we do not have access to – things we desire – but only on the condition that we use falsehood, theft, bribery, deceit. We will look at a few examples that show how we are caught in Satan's net through the advantages offered by theft accompanied by lies. These advantages can range from small and insignificant to very large.

One example is working under the table (or off the books), which means working without a registered employment contract or with a lower salary officially declared, while receiving the rest in untaxed cash. The advantage of accepting this "dark deal" is the significantly higher take-home pay. For those in this situation, giving up this "old" practice would be extremely difficult, because their income would drop significantly, and life would become much harder.

To secure a better standard of living, almost everyone pursues education, which ends with a diploma or qualification meant to help us later in life. We can see that during school exams—those required to obtain a diploma—Satan presents an offer that many accept.

He helps us get the diploma if we resort to cheating or stealing, thereby There shall in no wise abandoning truth. Then he helps us find enter into it any thing a good job, on the condition that we that maketh a lie! present, at the time of hiring, what we obtained through dishonesty.

However, by presenting a diploma or certificate that falsely claims we have the necessary knowledge for the position, we end up living a lie. (And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie. Revelation 21:27)

By using and enjoying what we have gained through theft and lies, we trap ourselves in a chain of iniquity from which many will never escape. (Every thief shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. Zechariah 5:3)

Another example of falling into Satan’s trap is the offer of early retirement (due to illness), obtained through gifts and lies. This refers to deceitfully claiming illness in order to leave work early and receive benefits—whether from the state or a private

pension fund—through manipulation. But lying, along with defrauding these systems and collecting income one is not rightfully entitled to, leads to disastrous spiritual consequences.

If someone in this situation later wants to repent, they will face a serious dilemma, because they cannot enter the Kingdom of God without returning the money obtained through deceit and lies.

In fact, the Lord requires everyone who wants to live in the Kingdom of righteousness to return what they acquired through dishonest means in their dark past. (Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the Lord. Numbers 5:7 Lord... if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. Luke 19:8-9)

Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking we live righteously if we enjoy things obtained dishonestly – things that have wronged the state or others. (Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house... Thou hast consulted shame to thy house... and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Habakkuk 2:9-11)

Another significant financial “benefit” Satan offers us is the low cost of many services we receive. The condition he sets is that we agree to work with those who evade taxes – those who do not issue receipts or fiscal documents for the services they provide. If these services were legally taxed, household expenses would increase by 20-30%, which many of us would find difficult to afford.

Some examples include: building a house, painting, repairs to heating, electrical, or plumbing systems, apartment rent, car repairs, and agricultural work such as plowing, sowing, harvesting... buying and cutting firewood, drilling a well.

The Scripture clearly tells us where we stand when we engage in such practices. (But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Psalms 50:16-18; Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul. Proverbs 29:24) Not paying taxes—such as sales tax or value added tax, depending on local legislation—can result in financial gain for both the buyer and the seller. For example, if you purchase firewood worth $1,000 without a

receipt, and the combined local tax rate is 11%, you avoid paying $110 in taxes—a substantial amount, especially for someone with a modest income.

Sadly, many who claim to be "born again"— at least in Romania—are caught in this chain of iniquity.

Evading taxes shows that we do not love or seek the things above – the righteousness of the Kingdom of God. (For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers. Render therefore to all their dues. Romans 13:6,7)

If we do such things and claim to be children of the Light, we are lying and not living the truth. (In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God. 1 John 3:10; If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:23)

Bribes and gifts are another old practice still common today in many places – even with garbage collectors. If we stop giving gifts, this will bring us difficulties of all kinds, the hardest being in hospitals, where neglect and suffering will follow. However, if we accept suffering on the hospital bed because we refuse to give bribes, it will be crowned with the fruit it produces—namely, long-suffering. (Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect. James 1:3-4)

To live in the Kingdom of righteousness, God requires us to give up the old things – those that belong to the way of the world – even if we will suffer losses, and to replace them with the new things of His Kingdom.

To help us be willing to give up the old things, we are given the promise of eternal life and the values of the Kingdom of righteousness – values that bring rest and peace to the soul. (For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Romans 14:17)

If we want to be in the Kingdom of God, we must give up tax evasion, replace the old things with the new ones of the Kingdom, and not covet what belongs to others. (Let him that stole steal no more. Ephesians 4:28; Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Matthew 22:21; Neither shalt thou desire any thing that is thy neighbour's. Deuteronomy 5:21)

When we are determined to no longer use these old things – to crucify them – we will lose the material advantages we once had. Difficulties will arise in our lives, and we will face situations that are hard to bear. But it is worth trying. (In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. John 16:33)

When troubles come, the Lord Jesus tells us that He will give us something of great value: His peace and rest. (And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. Isaiah 32:17)

All who understand the values of the Kingdom above and are determined to give up the old things must trust that God will not leave them and will provide for their daily needs. (But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33; Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Hebrews 13:5)

Most of those who are called to benefit from the Kingdom of God are not willing to pay this price, which often seems too high. But we must say that these things will keep them away from the Kingdom. God warns us that the one who sins does not know Him. (Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 1 John 3:6)

There is a distance as great as heaven is from earth between the one who indulges in sin and the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

If until now we have not submitted to the authority established by God—if we work off the books, drive without regard for traffic laws, feed ourselves on the world's television or internet, or speak evil of others—then we are still in the old state, where sin is a way of life, and we have not yet been born of God. (Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. Romans 13:1; For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 1 John 2:16)

We must understand that even if we do many religious things – if we attend church, pray, speak in tongues, or prophesy – yet do not pursue righteousness, God tells us He does not know us! (Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:21-23)

If the Holy Spirit has not convicted us of our sinful state, it means the new birth has not taken place. The first thing the Holy Spirit does in the one who receives the Word of God with joy is to convict them of their sin. This is the beginning. The Spirit cannot dwell in a person without convicting them of this condition. (And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness... John 16:8)

The Scripture makes a clear distinction between darkness and light. In the one who walks in the light, sin is no longer a way of life. He is marked by having given up the old things and by a hunger and thirst for righteousness and purity. (Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 1 John 3:8)

Let us be careful not to confuse the righteous person – born from above – who has a fall, with the one who has not yet given up the things of the kingdom of darkness. Let us not deceive ourselves by saying, “No one is without sin”, and use that as an excuse to remain in the things of darkness. (He that committeth sin is of the devil. 1 John 3:8)

There is a difference as great as heaven is from earth between the one who lives in darkness, not submitting to the authorities established by God, and the one who is submitted but falls into sin out of a lack of watchfulness.

In the first case, one can speak of ongoing sin and walking in darkness, in the old things, without God – even if we are among those who say we have turned to Him. (If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. 1 John 1:6; He that committeth sin is of the devil. 1 John 3:8)

In the second case, one can speak of unintentional, unwanted sin. In this case, through the confession of the sin, there is the possibility of cleansing through the blood of the Lord. (But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1 John 1:7)

The Scripture tells us very clearly how we can examine ourselves: if we are a new creation, the old things have passed away. (Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17, 18)

The attitude of resistance Another one of the old things that we find hard to give up – and which secures for us a way of life without too many troubles – is the attitude of resistance toward the one who wants to harm us. If someone tries to take what belongs to us or to humiliate us, a person has various solutions at hand to prevent this from happening. These solutions may be simple gestures of resistance, a harsh reply, an outburst of anger, or turning to the police or the courts.

Let's take an example: If we come home from work in the evening and someone has taken our parking spot, as a reaction of dissatisfaction, we may lift their windshield wiper. Maybe they won't care and will just put it back. Then we will leave a threatening note... or call the police

To solve this problem, if we turn to worldly ways – through resistance – we will find a solution. But if we choose to give up resistance and turn to the things above – to non-resistance – then we will be left with no choice but to be humiliated.

Perhaps in small matters (like someone cutting in line at the doctor), we're willing not to resist. But when our financial stability or physical safety is at risk, our priorities shift, and we no longer see clearly the things and values of the Kingdom.

Yet if we want to live in God's presence and experience His peace, we must accept the cost of letting go of this old way which only brings unrest, and replace it with the Lord's teaching (Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil. Matthew 5:38)

If we do not understand that we must carry our salvation through to the end, and grow into the full measure of Christ's fullness – if we do not understand that life in God's Kingdom means living in righteousness, being people of peace, long-suffering, and love – then we will still keep old things that we believe protect us from trouble.

We will keep a little resistance, so that when we are pressed from all sides, we can make life easier. We will keep a little cunning, a half-truth, undeclared work, bribery...

But to enter the Kingdom of God, we must sell everything we have – give up all old things – so that we can buy that treasure: the new things that replace the old. (The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Matthew 13:45, 46; But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness... Matthew 6:33)

The one who chooses the Kingdom must surrender to the mighty hand of God – and He will work. He will lay out the path that leads to peace, long-suffering, and love. (Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost. Hebrews 7:25)

Self-reflection:

– Are the old, earthly things still a way of life for you?

– Do you love the values of the Kingdom of God? Are you thirsty for righteousness?

– Have you sought the things above as a treasure and given up the things below?

This post is an excerpt from the booklet "The New Birth", which you can read in full, free of charge. More studies and resources for spiritual awakening are available at https://www.unmodifiedword.com.